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Lockhart The Scorpion: An Unpublished Manuscript

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Notes and Documents

Lockhart The Scorpion

An Unpublished Manuscript

The following article by John Gibson Lockhart (the manuscript of which is in my possession) has never, so far as I know, been printed. The Annual Fox dinner, on which Lockhart is giving a commentary, was held in the Waterloo Tavern, Edinburgh, on 24 January 1825, to celebrate the birthday of Charles James Fox. The first of these Whig dinners was held in 1821 and the last in 1826. The Tories, with their Pitt Club of Scotland, had been first in the field and the annual dinners help by the two parties helped to foment the bitter rivalry which was only too prevalent at that time. Lockhart could not have been present at the dinner even if he had wished for Cockburn tells us that the doors at the Fox dinners were carefully guarded to prevent the entry of spies and Lockhart, a well-known Tory, could hardly have eluded the sentries. The article is obviously based on newspaper reports. He sent it to William Maginn but I feel sure he did not really mean him to print it. Had it been published it would have caused almost as great a sensation as the famous Chaldee Manuscript in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and what Scott said of that he would have said of the Fox dinner report — "Edinburgh is rather too narrow for satire so markedly personal, and there are certainly several individuals who, from their character and situation, have reason to resent having been so roughly handled." Scott had warned Lockhart more than once. "Remember," he wrote to him, "it is to the *personal* satire I object and to the horse-play of your raillery." Although Sir Walter would have strongly disapproved of this article being published he would, in private, have chuckled over it, for it is a delightful piece of satire, extremely clever, extremely witty, and as a *jeu d'esprit* must be classed as one of Lockhart's masterpieces.

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It may be thought that we are merely trifling with the reading Public, by alluding to any doings of a set of people so utterly insignificant

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as the Whigs of the enlightened Capital Auld Reekie, alias Modern Athens. We cannot however refuse ourselves the gratification of remarking in a single sentence on the fact that out of "the two hundred noblemen and Gentlemen" placarded as having constituted the party at their Great Annual Fox dinner last week only *seven names* belong to persons holding landed property in this ancient and illustrious kingdom. The said seven being His Grace Alexander Duke of Hamilton and Brandon, brother of the Handmaiden to her late Majesty of blessed memory, Queen Caroline, and abdicator of his hereditary mansion when it was threatened by the radicals of Glasgow in the year 1819¹—*secundo* Lieut General the Earl of Rosslynn who holds a law sinecure of £4000 per annum in Scotland²—*tertio* the Lord Viscount Glenorchy who considering the structure of his lower person is addicted to wearing his philabeg too short³—Old Maule of Panmure "that prince of good fellows and king of old man"⁴—Angus Grant Timber-Feller in Inverness⁵—one Monteith a Lime-merchant in Galloway⁶

¹ Alexander Douglas Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton and 7th Duke of Brandon (1767-1852). His eldest sister, Lady Anne Hamilton, had been Lady in Waiting to Queen Caroline and had been, according to C. K. Sharpe, "very inferior to all the other Dames." (*Correspondence*, II, 93.) On the Radicals' threat to march on Hamilton Palace see Scott's amusing account in a letter to Morritt, 13 Nov. 1819. (*Letters*, VI, 16 and 25.)

² James St. Clair-Erskine, 2nd Earl of Rosslyn (1762-1837); Lieut. General, 1805; General, 1814. He was Director of Chancery and this is, presumably, the sinecure office to which Lockhart is alluding. According to a statement made by the Lord Advocate, Sir William Rae, in the House of Commons, March 30, 1824, "the Director of Chancery, with his clerks, might levy fees to any extent he thought proper," but that the commissioners appointed to enquire into the courts of justice of England, Scotland and Ireland, had "recommended, that at the termination of the existing interests in that office, the officers should receive a regular salary." (*Hansard*, N.S. Vol. XI, col. 24.) As there was no salary, Lockhart's "£4000" is probably no more than a guess as to the amount of fees collected by Rosslyn.

³ John Campbell, 2nd Marquess of Breadalbane (1796-1862). As Lord Glenorchy he sat as M.P. for Okehampton, 1820-26, and as Earl of Ormelie for Perthshire, 1832-34. He became the 2nd Marquess of Breadalbane in 1834.

⁴ William Ramsay Maule of Panmure (1771-1852), M.P. for Forfarshire, 1796, 1805-31; created Baron Panmure, 1831. Lockhart's calling him a "prince of good fellows" is an allusion to his well-known convivial habits. The words are slightly altered from the old song "There's auld Rob Morris" which Burns rewrote for Thomson's *Select collection of original Scottish airs*.

⁵ John Peter Grant (1774-1848) of Rochemurchus; Advocate and M.P.; knighted, 1827. The estate of Rochemurchus is near Inverness and was valuable for its forests — hence the ironical expression "timber-feller in Inverness." See also Lockhart's *Peter's letters*, II, 84-86, and Scott's *Letters*, VI, 329.

⁶ Charles Granville Stuart-Menteith (1769-1847); created a Baronet, 1838. He spent large sums developing the estate of Closeburn in Dumfriesshire which his father had purchased in 1783. Lockhart's reference to him as a "lime-merchant" would have been easily understood at the time. "The capacity of his limestone mines was greatly enlarged by the application of water-power; and he bought the estate of Mansfield on the borders of Ayrshire, to enable him to burn his lime at the smallest

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— and Gibson, a writer or attorney in Auld Reekie.⁷ These are their seven magnates, but even such as they are, they did not obtain the management of this grand meeting. The chair was filled by little Jeffrey, the prating Barrister whose name has been rendered at once infamous and ludicrous by the *Edinburgh Review*, a man of the lowest possible origin, the son of a Barber who actually walked about the streets of Auld Reekie with his Mambrino under his arm, shaving for a two-penny, and in manners a perfect caricature of vulgar pertness and dapper dandyism⁸ — This was the creature whom the longtailed⁹ Representative of the House of Hamilton supported upon the occasion. There were many points of contrast between the pair, but in two important particulars they agreed — they both dined in black stocks and they both clipped the King's English¹⁰ — Jeffrey imitating his Grace's costume, and His Grace being infected, we suppose, by the neighbourhood of the hereditary Shaver for Scotland. The Croupier was a sulky looking, crack-voiced Barrister of the name of Moncrieff¹¹ — a man of no sort of distinction in any way and the Stewards were such folk as "Hot and heavy, Hot and heavy," some-

cost with the coal found on his own property." (C.T. Ramage, *Drumlanrig Castle*, Dumfries, 1876, p. 213.)

⁷ James Gibson-Craig (1765-1850). He was a Writer to the Signet, the highest class of solicitor in Scotland, and Lockhart's "writer or attorney" is intended to be derogatory. He was originally James Gibson and on succeeding to Riccarton he assumed the additional name of Craig in 1823. By giving him only his baptismal name in 1825 Lockhart is having another dig at him. He was made a Baronet in 1831.

⁸ Francis Jeffrey (1773-1850), editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, 1803-29; Senator of the College of Justice as Lord Jeffrey, 1834. Lockhart's pen-picture of him is almost diabolically clever. The epithet "little" refers to his stature, Jeffrey being short and slightly built. His father, George Jeffrey, had been a Deputy Clerk of the Court of Session but Lockhart apparently knew that the Jeffrey family had been barbers and wigmakers in Edinburgh for several generations and George Jeffrey, in his youth, had no doubt frequented, and may even have assisted in, his father's, and later, his brother's, shop. The reference to the Mambrino reminds us that Lockhart had edited *Don Quixote* in 1822. The reference is to Part I, Bk. III, chap. VIII.

⁹ Cf. Scott's "touch not a hair of the long tail of his Grace of Hamilton." (*Letters*, VI, 16.)

¹⁰ The Duke of Hamilton (see Note 1) sat on Jeffrey's right hand. The black stock had been part of the military dress in the eighteenth century but had come to be adopted by bucks and Lockhart's combination of black stocks and clipping the King's English is intended to suggest that they were a couple of dandies. In *Peter's letters* (II, 60) Lockhart had described Jeffrey's pronunciation as "wretched" and as a "mixture of provincial English, and undignified Scotch, altogether snappish and offensive."

¹¹ James Moncrieff (1776-1851), son of Sir Henry Wellwood Moncrieff, a well-known Church of Scotland clergyman; advocate, 1799; succeeded as 9th Baronet, 1827; Senator of the College of Justice, 1828. Although Lockhart says here that he was "a man of no sort of distinction" he had described him in *Peter's letters* (II, 79) as "the most rising man at the Scottish Bar," but he does say that his voice was "harsh" and "unmusical."

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body of the name of Parlan Macparlan,¹² and another obscure little Barrister who we believe commenced his public life with a towel under his arm.¹³ These are the sort of gentry that now take the lead among the Whiggery of this poor certainly, but still proud "Nation of Gentlemen." These are the illustrious statesmen who toast "radical reform," "Catholic Emancipation," Joseph Humbug,¹⁴ and "that illustrious person" — so, God pity them, they absolutely did call him — Lord Archy.¹⁵ These are the sages and moralists who drank the memory of the old gambling and degraded sinner Charles Fox as "the greatest of public and the purest of private men"! (Hear! Hear!) These were the heroes who heard a ci-devant Tea-boy¹⁶ call the allied sovereigns of Europe "a parcel of rascally, swindling, Bandits!" — These — but we must not waste more words upon them. Their dinner is styled "sumptuous" in their own newspapers — and cost, toddy included, 10/6 per patriot.¹⁷

Only two things occurred to enliven the assemblage of dull democracy — and we must do His Grace of Hamilton the justice to say that even he laughed heartily at them when they were explained to his princely mind. Little Jeffrey, in toasting our friend Joseph of Aberdeen, said that "his greatness was bottomed on the broad basis of Arithmetic," and that "so long as CROKER¹⁸ remained he *would* not be forgotten." Upon this some "Gentleman whose name we could not hear"¹⁹ proposed

¹² John McFarlane (1767-1846), advocate. The name Parlan Macparlan was probably taken from Scott's *Rob Roy*. Parlane MacFarlane was Bailie Nicol Jarvie's maternal grandfather. (See chap. 31.)

¹³ I have been unable to identify this steward.

¹⁴ Joseph Hume (1777-1855), M.P. At the time of the dinner he was M.P. for the Aberdeen burghs.

¹⁵ Lord Archibald Hamilton (1769-1827), younger brother of the Duke of Hamilton (see Note 1): M.P. He was absent owing to indisposition. His health was proposed by John A. Murray, advocate.

¹⁶ John Boyd Greenshields (d. 1845), advocate; took the name Boyd on succeeding to Drum; his father was John Greenshields, a merchant in Glasgow, who presumably traded in tea.

¹⁷ Actually, tickets cost one guinea each.

¹⁸ John Wilson Croker (1780-1857), M.P. In 1823 a poem entitled "Vacation reminiscences" has appeared in which the following lines occurred:

Says Joseph Hume, "Though Croker's cuts have made an alter'd man o' me,
I'll still be foremost in the throng for preaching up economy."

(*Spirit of the Public Journals for 1823*, p.428)

"Croker" is correct, though there might be an allusion to Cocker whose *Arithmetic* was a famous book. A writer in the *Dublin and London Magazine for 1826* (p. 80), referred to "Mr. Hume's aptitude in applying the simple rules of Cocker to the business of the state."

¹⁹ This was Gilbert Laing Meason of Lindertis (d. 1832); adopted the additional surname Meason; brother of Malcolm Laing, the historian; in Italy in 1832 and met Sir Walter Scott a number of times; died at Rome on 13 August of the same year.

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the health of Mr Francis Jeffrey — Mr Francis Jeffrey returned thanks in a speech of EIGHTY-FIVE MINUTES length ²⁰ — sitting down as usual the moment the cramp seized his calf — whereupon up struck the waggish fiddlers

“Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace *bled*”

We would say *bled* in such a case here, but the other is in the Doric dialect the perfect tense of this verb active.

We had almost forgotten to say that Michael Angelo²¹ was present and that Jeffrey proposed his health as “one of the PRACTICAL BENEFACTORS of his species,” the said Jeffrey having dined with the great Michael only a few months back.

Dear Doctor

Accept the above and do as it seemeth good to thee

Yours

J. G. L.

[Addressed to :]

Dr. Maginn

21 Compton Street

Brunswick Square

London

[PM: 28 Jan. 1825.]

²⁰ Jeffrey’s speech, which seems to be verbatim in *The Scotsman* report, consisted of only 121 words!

²¹ Michael Angelo Taylor (1757-1834), M.P. In 1825 he represented Durham city.